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ABSTRACT

Chinese has been classified as an "isolating" language which expresses grammatical relation with few or no bound inflectional forms and many fixed syntactic constructions. The basis for this notion chiefly originated from the nature of Chinese monosyllabic structures and the relation of syntactic to morphological phenomena. Mandarin Chinese, however, does have bound grammatical morphemes, but their presence is less evident in the writing system than in connected speech. Chinese often uses various types of affixation as an important tool in morphological processes. The retroflexed suffix -r, described in this paper, is a characteristic feature of Mandarin Chinese and is one of the most important affixational devices in Mandarin morphological processes. It serves to indicate a semantic change from the stem word and to change certain form classes into nominals, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Not only does it enrich the lexicon of the language, but it also colors connected speech more vividly. (Author/AMM)

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THE FUNCTION OF THE RETROFLEXED SUFFIX -r IN THE MORPHOLOGICAL PROCESS OF MANDARIN CHINESE

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Languages vary greatly in the extent of their inflectional morphology. An old-fashioned classification of language used to regard Chinese as an "isolating" language which expresses grammatical relation with few or no bound inflectional forms and many fixed syntactic constructions. The basis for this notion chiefly originated from the nature of Chinese monosyllabic structures and the relation of syntactic to morphologic phenomena. Mandarin Chinese, however, does have bound grammatical morphemes, but their presence is less evident in the writing system than in connected speech. For instance, in the utterance like tāmen shuōzhao huàne 'They are talking', men, zhao, and ne are all the inflectional bound forms. The first one is used as a noun-plural bound morpheme; the latter two, progressive aspects. Thus, the Chinese language often uses various types of affixation as an important

[1]The Chinese retroflexed suffix -r is originally derived from a free morpheme /ər/(second tone) meaning "child". There are in Chinese a very small number of monosyllabic words which have the same segmental elements of /ər/ with a different tone, such as /ər/, with the second tone, in addition to the "child", also meaning "moreover"; with the third tone, it means "ear, near, you, or cookie"; fourth tone, "two". This retroflexed sound /ər/ can also be a grammatical suffix. When it does so, it often changes its nature into a nonsyllabic /-r/, being added to a great number of either monosyllabic or polysyllabic words, giving the "r-coloring" to the preceding syllables with the specific pronunciation depending on the phonological rules of its dialect. Since the discussion

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tool in morphological processes. The retroflexed suffix -r is one of the most interesting of such features.

The retroflexed suffix -r commonly occurs in most Mandarin speaking areas. It is one of the morphological devices used in various different manners and to different degrees in individual Mandarin dialects, and it is much more widespread in the Peiping dialect than in any other Mandarin dialect. It generally serves as a nominal ending which adds a new meaning to that of its stem nominal. In the Peiping dialect, the retroflexed suffix -r tends to occur after any kind of nominal. A native speaker of the Peiping dialect may add a retroflexed suffix -r to nouns referring to any kind of concrete object and to a few abstract ideas. For instance, one can add a retroflexed suffix -r to words such as niǎo 'bird'~ niǎor; huā 'flower'~ huār; and also to such abstract words as bèi 'generation'~ bèir; kōng 'empty, hollow'~ kōngr. Thus, there are no infallible rules for determining which nominals may have such an ending in conversational speech. However, since this suffixal morpheme -r is originally derived from the free morpheme /ər/(second tone), which means "child" or "smallness" and also has a sense of "cuteness", there is a general area of meaning

of the phonological features is beyond the scope of this study, and for the sake of convenience, throughout this study, the author simply follows the Pinyin system transcribing this morpheme, as well as the examples themselves.

for it--that is, whenever the speaker wants to express some emotional fondness for things that are relatively small, the retroflexed suffix -r will be immediately added after the stem morpheme, as in xiǎo háir 'small child', xiǎo māor 'small cat', xiǎo chuángr 'small bed' (i. e., xiǎo 'small' + hái 'child' + -r, etc.)

It must be noted that the retroflexed suffix -r expresses more shades of meaning than just that of diminution. It has in some cases a more specific designation when added to the stem word. The following pairs of words will show the differences between them. The first one of each pair is the stem word; the second, the retroflexed suffix -r added.

1a. xīn 'heart'

rénxīn 'human heart'

b. xīnr 'the central part of certain things'

càixīnr 'the central part of the vegetable'

dengxinr 'lamp wick'

2a. xìn 'letter'

zhè shì nǐde xìn. 'This is your letter'.

b. xìnr 'news, message'

gěi tā dàige xìnr. 'Bring the message to him'.

3a tóu 'head'

réntóu 'human head'

b. tóur 'leader, top, or end'

tā shì wǒmende tóur. 'He is our leader'.

qiángtóurshang zhǎngle cǎo. 'On the top of the wall, there grows grass'.

zhège gùshi méitóur. 'This story has no end'.

The retroflexed suffix -r functioning as a nominal ending occurs not only after nouns, but also after other classes of words, changing the class of its stem words into a nominal form. There are two form classes, verbal and adjectival, to which the nominal suffix -r is commonly added in connected speech. Examples can be given as follows:

	Stem word: verb	Suffix added: nominal
1.	chī 'to eat'	chīr 'foods'
	wǒ méichī.	wǒ méichīr.
	'I have not eaten'.	'I have no foods to eat'.
2.	jiǎng 'to tell, to explain'	jiǎngr 'meaning'
	zhège zì méijiǎng.	zhège zì méi jiǎngr.
	'This word is not explained'.	'This word is meaningless'.
3.	gài 'to cover'	gàir 'lid'
	nǐ méiyǒu gài hǎo.	píngzi méiyǒu gàir.
	'You have not covered it well'.	'There is no lid on the bottle'.

	Stem word: adjective	Suffix added: nominal
1.	liàng 'bright'	liàngr 'light'
	zhèr bùliàng.	zhèr méiyǒu liàngr.
	'It's not bright here'	'There is no light here'.
2.	jiān 'sharp'	jiānr 'point'
	zhè qīngbǐ hěn jiān.	zhè qiānbǐ méiyǒu jiānr.

'This pencil is very sharp'. 'This pencil has no point'.

3. yuǎn 'far' yuǎnr 'long distance'

nàr hěn yuǎn. nǐ ràole yuǎnr.

'It's very far there'. 'You took a long way",

Not only does the retroflexed suffix -r serve as a noun ending and a pronoun ending as in zhèr 'here' and nàr 'there', but it also function as a verbal, an adjectival and an adverbial suffix. When it does so, the stem word is often in a polysyllabic reduplicative constructions.[2] In addition, except for the verb, the adjective and adverb often have another structural suffix -de followed its suffix -r. The examples can be given as follows:

1. Verb:[3]

děng 'to wait' děngdengr

tǎng 'to lie down' tǎngtangr

xǐng 'to wake up' xǐngxingr

2. Adjective:

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[2]There are certain stem-words can simply be added by the retroflexed suffix -r without a repetition of themselves. For instance: the verb wán 'to play'~ wánr as a noncontrastive allomorph of wán; the adjective yìdīngdiǎn 'a little'~ yìdīngdiǎnr; and the adverb yīkuài 'together'~ yīkuàir and so on.

[3]There is a noncontrastive variant of such verbs which is formed by inserting a morpheme yī between the reduplicative structure, as in,

děngyīděngr tǎngyītǎngr xǐngyīxǐngr

gāo 'high, lofty' gāogaorde

bò 'thin' bòborde

dàfāng 'generous, dignified' dàdafāngfangrde

lǎoshí 'sincere, honest' lǎolaoshíshirde

3. Adverb:

hǎo 'good, well' hǎohaorde

màn 'slow' mànmanrde

qīng 'soft, not loud' qīngqingrde

In Chinese speech, there are two other words, namely zǐ 'child' or 'son' and tóu 'head' which are also commonly used as nominal suffixes. Since zǐ also has etymologically a meaning of 'child', it often serves as an alternant of the suffix -r and function as a noncontrasting variant, as in

fǎr 'means, method' = fǎzi

kòur 'button' = kòuzi

fànguǎnr 'restaurant' = fànguǎnzi

However, since zi has no obligatory sense of diminution or of emotional fondness as the suffix -r usually does, the two are not completely interchangeable, for instance:

nǚr 'daughter' ≠ nǚzi 'woman, girl'

huār 'flower' ≠ huāzi 'flower seed, beggar'

In some cases, they are in complementary distribution, as in

Suffix -r:

cí 'words, expression' ~ cír (*cizi)

xiǎoshuō 'story, novel' ~ xiǎoshuōr (*xiaoshuozi)

Suffix -zi:

lóng 'deaf' ~ lóngzi 'a deaf person' (*longr)

rì 'sun, day" ~ rìzi 'day, a date' (*rir)

The interchangeability of the suffixes -r and -zi after certain nominals is basically dialectal, but each case is dependent upon the speech habits of the community. In general, the native speakers of the Peiping dialect seem to have a preference for the suffix -r, whenever they feel such an ending is suitable for the nominal, whereas the Mandarin speakers of non-Peiping areas tend to use suffix -zi more. For instance, a Peiping speaker says, lǎotóur 'old man', xiǎoháir 'small child', běnr 'notebook, volume', xìngr 'apricot'; the Mandarin speakers of non-Peiping dialects would say: lǎotóuzi, xiǎoháizi, běnzi, and xìnzi.

Interestingly enough, the retroflexed suffix -r can also occur, especially in the Peiping dialect, after any one of the two other suffixes -zi and -tou, forming two kinds of nominal suffix-cluster: -zir 'seed, a sense of small unit' and -tour with the meaning of 'leader, top, or end' when added to a noun-stem word, or with the meaning of 'it is worth...' when added to a verb-stem word. Following are some examples:

1. Suffix cluster -zir:

Stem word:	Suffix cluster -zir added:

a. tóng 'copper'	tóngzir 'copper coins'
b. guā 'melon'	guāzir 'dried melon seeds'
c. jī 'chicken'	jīzir 'chicken egg'
2. Suffix cluster -tour:	
A. Noun-stem word:	Suffix cluster -tour added:
a. pài 'sect, branch'	pàitour 'imposing behavior'
b. nián 'year'	niántour 'year, crop, harvest'
c. shuǐ 'water'	shuǐtour 'the water source'
B. Verb-stem word:	Suffix cluster -tour added:
a. mái 'to buy'	máitour '[It is] worth buying'
b. kàn 'to see, to look at'	kàntour '[It is] worth seeing or looking at'
c. chī 'to eat'	chītour '[It is] worth eating'

In conclusion, the retroflexed suffix -r is a characteristic feature of Mandarin Chinese and is one of the most important affixational devices in Mandarin morphological processes. It serves, on the one hand, to indicate a semantic change from the stem word, and on the other hand, to change certain form classes into nominals, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. Not only does it enrich the lexicon of the language, but it also colors connected speech more vividly.

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